

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 LONDON 03381 01 OF 02 281823Z
ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EURE-00 SP-02 USIA-06 AID-05 EB-08
NSC-05 TRSE-00 SS-15 STR-04 OMB-01 CEA-01 CIAE-00
COME-00 FRB-03 INR-07 NSAE-00 XMB-02 OPIC-03 LAB-04
SIL-01 DODE-00 PA-01 PRS-01 L-03 H-01 /086 W
-----281829 076433 /41

R 281806Z FEB 77
FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1071
INFO AMCONSUL BELFAST
AMCONSUL EDINBURGH

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LONDON 03381

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, PDEV, UK
SUBJECT: DEVOLUTION: WHAT NEXT?

REF: LONDON 3109

SUMMARY: WITH THE DEVOLUTION BILL PRESUMPTIVELY DEAD FOR THE CURRENT SESSION OF PARLIAMENT, THE GOVERNMENT'S IMMEDIATE CONCERN IS TO LIMIT POLITICAL DAMAGE, ESPECIALLY IN SCOTLAND. FOLLOWING LAST WEEK'S CLOTURE VOTE DEBACLE, IT REAFFIRMED ITS STRONG COMMITMENT TO DEVOLUTION FOR SCOTLAND AND WALES, ANNOUNCED IT WOULD UNDERTAKE BILATERAL TALKS WITH THE OPPOSITION PARTIES AND, FOR AT LEAST THE NEXT SEVERAL WEEKS, DELAY FURTHER CONSIDERATION OF THE BILL. IT HOPES TO INCREASE SUPPORT FOR A MODIFIED FORM OF THE CURRENT BILL AND TO ENSURE THE CONSERVATIVE AND LIBERAL PARTIES SHARE FULL RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE DEFEAT OF THE TIMETABLE MOTION. ALTHOUGH GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS ARE NOT OPTIMISTIC ABOUT BROADENING THE BASE OF SUPPORT FOR THE DEVOLUTION BILL, THE SCOTTISH MEDIA HAVE BLISTERED THE TORIES AND LIBERALS FOR THEIR PART IN THE TIMETABLE FIASCO.
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 LONDON 03381 01 OF 02 281823Z

ELABORATION OF TORY VIEWS ON DEVOLUTION OVER THE WEEK-END APPEARS TO HAVE AIDED THE GOVERNMENT'S CAUSE FINALLY THERE ARE INDICATIONS THAT THE SCOTTISH AND WELSH NATIONALISTS ARE RECONSIDERING THEIR EARLIER DECISIONS TO PUSH FOR AN EARLY NO CONFIDENCE VOTE, WHILE BY-ELECTION RESULTS SUGGEST THAT THE LIBERALS HAVE REGAINED LITTLE OF THE POPULARITY LOST OVER THE

PAST TWO YEARS. IT IS TOO EARLY, HOWEVER, TO TALLY UP THE FULL POLITICAL COSTS OF THESE DEVELOPMENTS. END SUMMARY.

1. MOST OBSERVERS BELIEVE THE GOVERNMENT'S DEVOLUTION BILL IS EFFECTIVELY DEAD FOR THE CURRENT SESSION OF PARLIAMENT AS A RESULT OF THE FEBRUARY 23 DEFEAT OF THE TIMETABLE MOTION (REFTEL). THE GOVERNMENT GAMBLERD AND LOST. THE MINISTER RESPONSIBLE FOR DEVOLUTION, JOHN SMITH, IS EVEN MORE BEARISH -- BARRING A POLITICAL MIRACLE, HE DOES NOT BELIEVE DEVOLUTION STANDS A CHANCE OF PASSAGE UNTIL AFTER THE NEXT GENERAL ELECTION, AND ONLY THEN IF LABOR SHOULD WIN A COMFORTABLE MAJORITY. THE GOVERNMENT, HE TOLD AN EMBOFF, WILL INITIATE BILATERAL TALKS WITH THE OPPOSITION PARTIES IN AN EFFORT TO BROADEN THE BASE OF SUPPORT FOR A REVISED DEVOLUTION BILL, BUT THE TALKS WILL BE DIRECTED PRIMARILY AT SMOKING OUT THE TORIES AND THE LIBERALS. THE FORMER PARTY ESPECIALLY, ACCORDING TO SMITH, HAS OBSCURED ITS POSITION ON DEVOLUTION -- ALTHOUGH STILL FORMALLY COMMITTED TO DEVOLUTION, THE PARTY IS EFFECTIVELY OPPOSED -- AND CAN BE DAMAGED IN SCOTLAND BY EXPOSURE OF ITS REAL POSITION. CLEARER ARTICULATION OF THE CONSERVATIVE POSITION WILL ALSO INTENSIFY PRO-/ANTI-DEVOLUTION DIVISIONS WITHIN THE TORY PARTY. SMITH ALSO BELIEVES THE LIBERALS MISCALCULATED IN FAILING TO SUPPORT THE TIMETABLE MOTION, AS THEY ARE NOW TAKING THE RAP FOR ITS FAILURE, ALONG WITH THE TORY DEVOLUTIONISTS AND THE LABOR ANTI-DEVOLUTIONISTS. HAD THE LIBERALS VOTED

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 LONDON 03381 01 OF 02 281823Z

WITH THE GOVERNMENT, THE MOTION STILL WOULD HAVE FAILED, BUT THE LIBERALS WOULD NOT HAVE DAMAGED THEIR STANDING IN SCOTLAND. AS A RESULT, SMITH BELIEVES THERE IS A POSSIBILITY OF REACHING AN ACCOMMODATION WITH THE LIBERALS ON A REVISED BILL WITHOUT GIVING AWAY TOO MUCH, PARTICULARLY IN VIEW OF LAST WEEK'S LONDON BY-ELECTION WHICH CONFIRMED THE SHARP FALL OFF IN LIBERAL SUPPORT (THEY LOST THEIR DEPOSIT).

2. ON FEBRUARY 24, FOLLOWING A CABINET MEETING ON THE DEVOLUTION BILL, LEADER OF THE HOUSE MICHAEL FOOT ANNOUNCED THAT THE GOVERNMENT REMAINED STRONGLY COMMITTED TO DEVOLUTION, THAT IT WOULD INITIATE BILATERAL TALKS WITH THE OPPOSITION PARTIES TO FIND AREAS OF AGREEMENT AND POSSIBLE ACCOMMODATION ON A REVISED BILL AND THAT FURTHER CONSIDERATION OF THE BILL WOULD BE DELAYED FOR THE TIME BEING.

3. STATEMENTS BY CONSERVATIVE LEADER MARGARET THATCHER

AND DEVOLUTION SPOKESMAN FRANCIS PYM OVER THE WEEKEND

CONFIDENTIAL

NNN

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 LONDON 03381 02 OF 02 281829Z
ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EURE-00 SP-02 USIA-06 AID-05 EB-08
NSC-05 TRSE-00 SS-15 STR-04 OMB-01 CEA-01 CIAE-00
COME-00 FRB-03 INR-07 NSAE-00 XMB-02 OPIC-03 LAB-04
SIL-01 DODE-00 PA-01 PRS-01 L-03 H-01 /086 W
-----281832 076504 /41

R 281806Z FEB 77
FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1072
INFO AMCONSUL BELFAST
AMCONSUL EDINBURGH

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 LONDON 03381

AGAIN INDICATED THAT THE TORIES ARE NOT SERIOUSLY
INTERESTED IN DEVOLVING POWER TO SCOTLAND AND WALES.
MRS. THATCHER TOLD A TORY LOCAL GOVERNMENT CONFERENCE
THAT IT WOULD BE WRONG FOR THE GOVERNMENT TO INITIATE
TALKS WITH THE OTHER PARTIES AS LONG AS IT REMAINED
COMMITTED TO A PARTICULAR FORM OF DEVOLUTION, WHILE
PYM OUTLINED SIX PRINCIPLES RELATING TO THE GOVERNMENT
OF SCOTLAND WHICH MADE NO MENTION OF AN ELECTED AS-
SEMBLY OR DEVOLVED LEGISLATIVE AND EXECUTIVE POWERS.

4. MEDIA REACTION IN SCOTLAND TO THE DEFEAT OF THE
TIMETABLE MOTION, WHILE CRITICAL OF THE GOVERNMENT'S
INABILITY TO DELIVER ON ITS ELECTION PLEDGE, WAS MOST
HOSTILE TO THE CONSERVATIVE DEVOLUTIONISTS AND THE
LIBERALS FOR THEIR FAILURE TO SUPPORT CLOTURE. THE
LETTERS COLUMNS SEEMED TO REINFORCE THE MEDIA'S PER-
CEPTIONS. THIS, OF COURSE, ENABLED THE GOVERNMENT TO
REFLECT THAT THE SITUATION WAS NOT AS BAD AS IT MIGHT
HAVE BEEN, AND THAT IS NOT NOTHING. AN OPINION POLL
TAKEN SHORTLY AFTER THE LOSS OF THE CLOTURE MOTION
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 LONDON 03381 02 OF 02 281829Z

INDICATED THAT THE SCOTTISH NATIONAL PARTY (SNP) HAD PICKED UP SUBSTANTIAL SUPPORT AND NOW LEADS BOTH THE LABOR AND CONSERVATIVE PARTIES (AS THIS DATA WAS DEVELOPED BY A HERETOFORE UNKNOWN POLLING ORGANIZATION, WE HAVE DOUBTS ABOUT ITS STATISTICAL RELIABILITY, THOUGH THE IDENTIFIED TREND APPEARS CORRECT -- WE EXPECT A REGULAR ORC POLL SHORTLY).

5. COMMENT: EVENTS SUBSEQUENT TO WEDNESDAY NIGHT'S VOTE WERE LARGELY PREDICTABLE. AMONG THE QUESTIONS REMAINING TO BE ANSWERED ARE: WHETHER THE GOVERNMENT'S DAMAGE LIMITING STRATEGY WILL SUCCEED; WHETHER NEW SUPPORT CAN BE FOUND FOR A REVISED BILL; WHETHER THE SNP AND PLAID CYMRU WILL SEEK TO DEFEAT THE GOVERNMENT AT THE EARLIEST OPPORTUNITY; AND THE EXTENT TO WHICH RECENT EVENTS WILL CHANGE POLITICAL ALLEGIANCES IN SCOTLAND AND WALES AND THE DURABILITY OF THE NEW POLITICAL AFFINITIES. THE EARLY REACTION IN SCOTLAND, TOGETHER WITH THE RECENT STATEMENTS OF CONSERVATIVE LEADERS, SUGGEST THAT THE GOVERNMENT MAY BE ABLE TO MINIMIZE ITS POLITICAL LOSSES. ALTHOUGH WE SHARE THE GENERAL PESSIMISM ABOUT THE OUTLOOK FOR THE DEVOLUTION BILL IN THE CURRENT PARLIAMENT, THERE APPEARS TO BE SOME POSSIBILITY OF ACCOMMODATION WITH THE LIBERALS, AND WITH THAT SUPPORT ASSURED, THE GOVERNMENT MIGHT BE ABLE TO GAIN THE SUPPORT OF SOME LABOR DISSENTS. SINCE THIS POSSIBILITY EXISTS, THE BILL'S FUTURE CANNOT BE COMPLETELY DISCOUNTED. LACKING ANY HARD INFORMATION, WE ARE DOUBTFUL THAT THE SNP WILL MODIFY ITS OBJECTIVE OF FORCING AN EARLY GENERAL ELECTION. PARLIAMENTARY SOURCES, HOWEVER, REPORT THAT THE WELSH NATIONALISTS HAVE SOFTENED THEIR POSITION ON A CONFIDENCE VOTE AND ARE NOW VERY MUCH IN DOUBT. THIS, TOGETHER WITH THE LIBERALS' MOST RECENT BY-ELECTION SHOWING, SHOULD INCREASE THE GOVERNMENT'S MANEUVERING ROOM. CLEARLY, THE REACTION IN SCOTLAND

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 LONDON 03381 02 OF 02 281829Z

WILL BENEFIT ONLY THE NATIONALISTS, BUT WE WILL HAVE TO WAIT FOR THE NEXT ORC POLL TO HAVE MEANINGFUL DATA ON THE EXTENT OF SHIFTS IN VOTER SENTIMENT, AND EVEN LONGER TO VENTURE ANY CONCLUSIONS ABOUT THEIR DURABILITY.

ARMSTRONG

CONFIDENTIAL

NNN

Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: REPORTS, POLITICAL SITUATION, SELFDETERMINATION, LEGISLATIVE BILLS, REFERENDUMS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 28-Feb-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977LONDON03381
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: X1
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770068-1104
Format: TEL
From: LONDON
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t1977023/aaaaacsd.tel
Line Count: 223
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 2b8717c5-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 77 LONDON 3109
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 11-Mar-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3289988
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: DEVOLUTION: WHAT NEXT?
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, PDEV, UK
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/2b8717c5-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009